

Is Peace Breaking Out in the Middle East?
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We keep hearing that peace in the Middle East only requires a peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians. The outbreak of what is being called "the Arab Spring" has proven this notion wrong. None of the Muslim countries currently in ferment give a hoot about the Palestinians and Israelis; they want to get out from under dictatorial regimes that have held them in thrall for decades

They want "freedom" and "dignity." modernity, prosperity, and the decent life that they see in the West. However, some men do not want this for their wives and daughters. Egyptian freedom demonstrators attacked a demonstration of women who mistakenly thought that the Arab Spring was theirs too.

I just returned from my first visit to Israel, a country I knew far less than I know Iran, Turkey, and Egypt. While there, Palestinian terrorists did a home invasion and slit the throats of a family, including their three-month-old baby; launched more than 60 missiles at communities in southern Israel; and staged the first bombing in some years at the Jerusalem bus station, during rush hour to ensure the greatest number of casualties, some of them undoubtedly Arab-Israelis.

I saw the "infamous" wall that Israel constructed to keep West Bank terrorists from crossing for suicide bombing. The solid wall exists only in urban areas where sniping was once possible. Elsewhere, it is an electronic fence. There were places along the highway from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem where snipers, from multi-story houses, could hit drivers. The wall prevents this.

I met Palestinian Israelis who ran restaurants and shops, and learned of many others-educated professionals with Israeli counterparts---who regard them as colleagues. Nobody is happy with the checkpoints and daily harassments that Palestinians endure; but nobody is ready for a Palestinian state not made by political agreement. Herein lies the problem.

Yasser Arafat came close to making a political deal with Israel, but he was warned that Islamists would kill him for it. Islamists want to retrieve every inch of land once ruled by Islam. On the Israeli side, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was murdered by an Israeli religious fanatic who objected to a deal because he too believed that Israel should take back every inch of land once ruled by ancient Israel. And remember what happened to Egyptian peacemaker Sadat. Religious extremists are a menace to peace.

Israelis who understand Arabic know that speeches made in English by Palestinian leaders are not the same as those made in Arabic to their own people. The western press has remained clueless about this, taking these leaders at their word.

All Arab states, Palestinians included, have a long way to go to attain a liberal democracy. Democracy only means majority rule; liberal democracy means protection for minorities, independent press, and independent judiciary (at the very least). In the Middle East, only Israel has all of these.

Israel has a messy democracy, no constitution, and multi-parties that include representatives in parliament who do not believe in the country that gives them these freedoms. After visiting the holocaust museum with its horrific message of near extermination, we learned that on Holocaust Memorial Day, everyone stops at 11 am for a few moments of silence, except for two groups.

Arab Israelis do not consider this commemoration right for them, which I can understand; but Ultra-Orthodox Jews refuse to acknowledge this holiday either. Their way would be wearing sackcloth and ashes. But there are some among them who do not believe there should be a Jewish state before the Messiah returns. These same people manage nonetheless, to have political representation and unconscionable welfare from that same Israeli government. (Democracy isn't easy.)

If a political solution did ultimately create a Palestinian state, would Jewish communities be able to live there as freely as Arabs live in Israel today? Ask the Coptic Christian community in Egypt (or West Bank Christian Arabs) how good are their chances of surviving, despite demonstrating side by side with Muslim "brothers" during their uprisings.

No, I don't think Peace is about to break out in the Middle East.

679 words

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